

[Spirituality](#)



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by Thomas Gumbleton

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We are not used to thinking of ourselves as prophets, although at the time of our baptism, the priest anointed us and said the words, "I anoint you according to the way of Jesus as priest, prophet, and ruler so that you may live always as a member of his body." We were anointed to be prophets like [in] Ezekiel in our first lesson today. Again, I think most of us say, "I'm a prophet? How can I speak for God?" Well, the best way to speak for God, and we do it, not in words so much, but in our life, the way we live, our actions.

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Psalms 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 13:8-10

Matthew 18:15-20

[Full text of the readings](#)

That's why what St. Paul says to the church at Rome today [that] is so important: "Do not be in debt to anyone. Let this be the only debt of one to another — love." (Let that be the only thing that you're in debt for — that you love; that's your debt.) "The one who loves their neighbor fulfills the law. Love cannot do the neighbor any harm, so love fulfills the whole law." Love your neighbor as yourself. As we know, that's the second and greatest commandment.

Sometimes that love will require us to do what is described in the Gospel lesson. We sometimes fall into disputes with other people, even within our families. Sometimes we hurt one another. Certainly in our community, in this country, there is much that needs to be healed because of lack of love for one another. In our world, the violence that is going on is overwhelming. We must learn to become reconciling. Jesus, if you remember in the Sermon on the Mount, told us that even if you're going to the altar and there you remember a brother or a sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar, go and first be reconciled with your brother or sister, and only then come and offer your gift.

Reconciliation, forgiveness — that's the kind of love that Jesus is asking of us. That can be, again, on any level within our immediate family, within our parish family, within our community, within our nation, within our world. We must reach out in love for one another, break down those barriers of hatred and isolation. That's what Jesus is teaching so clearly in today's Gospel lesson. He offers kind of a program of how to do it.

If it's a problem between you and another person, go to the person, try to talk about it, try to heal, try to be loving and forgiving. If that doesn't work, then take a couple of other people with you and have an open discussion about how the rift that has developed can be healed. Or, finally, bring it to the whole church if it's such a serious problem. Within our church community, we should be discussing how we, as a community, could heal the hatreds and the divisions that are taking place in our country and in our world.

You know, it's amazing, how, when a terrible tragedy happens like the hurricanes in Texas and now in Florida, people pour out in love. But then those same people might go back home and be nasty to their brothers or sisters at home. We do have that capacity to love and to be generous and to reach out, but we sometimes fail to carry it out. I ask you to notice especially the Gospel lesson where Jesus says when you try it with the person himself or herself and it doesn't work, get a couple people to help you or bring it to the whole community.

Then at the end of that, it might seem like (and this has been interpreted this way), if the person doesn't respond even to the whole community, then we are instructed to put the person out, treat them as a publican or a gentile or a tax collector. In some Christian communities they even have the idea of shunning. But I ask you who was writing that? One who had been a tax collector! Matthew. So Jesus is saying not to put them out, but to treat them like he treated even the publicans, the gentiles, the tax collectors — those who were named as public sinners.

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You reach out in love no matter what; that's the message of Jesus. It's so clear to us, again, in what St. Paul says: "Love cannot do the neighbor any harm. Love fulfills the whole law." In our lives now, I hope each of us will try to determine how I must

become more of a reconciling, a loving, a forgiving person, and how we can do that within our community at every level. Pope Francis gives us extraordinary examples of this.

Right now he's in Colombia, a nation where for 40 or almost 50 years there's been a terrible, violent civil war. Tens of thousands of people have been killed. Finally, a year or so ago they brought about reconciliation, a peace treaty. But then when it was put to a public vote, a small majority (but it was a majority) said no, they weren't ready to forgive. [Pope Francis is there](#) pleading with these people to reconcile, be forgiving. He has done this in other situations of violence. He goes and he shows us, this is what it means to be a prophet. He is proclaiming the word of God in a very public and dramatic way.

Each of us in our own private and maybe less dramatic way are called to do the same thing — reach out in forgiveness, reconciliation and love. That's fulfilling the whole law. And if we do that, then each of us will be the prophet that God calls us to be, proclaiming God's word in the midst of our community, in the midst of our world. That word will gradually heal all our divisions and bring us to a fullness of peace in our family, our community, and in fact, our nation and the world.

[Homily given Sept 10 at St. Philomena Parish in Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]